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THE CHILDREN'S YEAR AND THE WOMAN'S COMMITTEE

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When appointed a part of the Council of National Defense, April 21, 1917, the Woman's Committee organized at once into ten departments. One of these was the Department of Child Welfare.

The primary business of the Woman's Committee was to effect an organization of the woman power of the country and so put a force of no mean value for war work at the disposal of the government. This business of centralizing and coördinating the ninety-two national organizations, including about eleven million women now affiliated with the committee, was no light task. It occupied the Woman's Committee for the first months of its existence. When the state divisions had finally been organized, when counties, towns, districts, wards and even precincts had been provided with committees paralleling the organization of the Woman's Committee at Washington, the result of eight months of energetic effort was some ten thousand units of organization ready to take up the numerous services the war has laid upon the citizenship of the country.

A program of Child Welfare had been prepared. In April, 1917, Mrs. Josiah Evans Cowles, a member of the committee and also President of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, became the national chairman of the Department of Child Welfare. With admirable keenness of vision, Mrs. Cowles and the Woman's Committee turned at once to Miss Julia Lathrop, Chief of the Children's Bureau of the United States Department of Labor, inviting her to take the executive chairmanship of the Department of Child Welfare and direct the war-time program for children.

It was a fortunate arrangement, this close coöperation between the Woman's Committee and the Children's Bureau. Both parties to the plan were strengthened by it: the community was assured a sound program of democratic work for children. Allying itself with the Woman's Committee, the Children's Bureau gained the use of an organization with a wider grasp and reach than any ever before effected in the nation's history. The Woman's Committee, on the

other hand, was enabled to act with the least possible amateurishness; its Child Welfare Department became in the best sense an extension of a government bureau and thus, from the start, avoided those wastes that arise from paralleling government work. Thus there are two groups always mutually dependent,—trained government investigators sobered by the discipline of regular research work, and enthusiastic volunteers as rich in eager earnestness as they are apt to be poor in experience, now collaborating to work out the program and push the events of the "Children's Year."

The period from May to December, 1917, was a time of preliminaries. What correspondence went out to the state divisions of the Woman's Committee went from the Children's Bureau. The Chief of the Children's Bureau in her fifth annual report of June, 1917, page 49, writes:

The pressing essentials of a reasonable child-welfare program for the United States in war time may be condensed under four heads:

- I. Public protection of maternity and infancy.
- II. Mothers' care for older children.
- III. Enforcement of all child-labor laws and full schooling for all children of school age. Standards should be maintained in spite of war pressure.
- IV. Recreation for children and youth, abundant, decent, protected from any form of exploitation.

This program the Woman's Committee adopted at their December meeting as the program of their Child Welfare Department. It was plain that to set the details of such a program before forty-eight states and three territories would require much special attention. Miss Lathrop knew her staff at the bureau was more than occupied with their regular service of research. She therefore suggested that a separate service be provided through the Council of National Defense to make the connection between the bureau's program and the women's defense organizations of the country. At the December meeting of the Woman's Committee, Dr. Jessica B. Peixotto, professor of social economics at the University of California, was invited to take charge of this service.

The separate service for the work of organizing, corresponding and transmitting has, in the period since January, grown to a large clerical force busily and breathlessly engaged in sending out hundreds of letters, thousands of leaflets, pamphlets, posters and other printed matter for propaganda and publicity, and millions of weighing and measuring cards.

During the months that lie between January 15 and the time of writing this report, the Children's Year has been announced; the state divisions of the Woman's Committee have accepted the responsibility the program lays upon them, for the most part with alacrity and fine imagination. Thorough-going child welfare departments have been organized in all but one state. One conference of the state chairmen of child welfare has been held at Washington. Hearty participation in the work at such points as mutual objects permit has been given by the National Committee on Child Welfare of the General Medical Board under Dr. S. McC. Hamill; the Department of Civilian Relief of the American Red Cross through its director general, Mr. W. Frank Persons; the nursing section of the American Red Cross under Miss Jane Delano; the nursing section of the Council of National Defense through Miss Ella Phillips Crandall; the United States Bureau of Education, United States Public Health Service and the United States Department of Agriculture, and by more than a score of national societies interested in the recreation of children.

The plan all this machinery furthers, the plan to take thought in time to save the children, sensitive source of our future population, was named "The Children's Year." When this "Children's Year" program of prevention and protection was set before President Wilson by the Secretary of Labor, the nation's leader promptly expressed his belief in the wisdom and foresight of it. The following letter addressed to Secretary Wilson appeared in the press April 3:

Next to the duty of doing everything possible for the soldiers at the front, there could be, it seems to me, no more patriotic duty than that of protecting the children who constitute one-third of our population. The success of the efforts made in England in behalf of the children is evidenced by the fact that the infant death-rate in England for the second year of the war was the *lowest* in her history.

Attention is now being given to education and labor conditions for children by legislatures in both France and England, showing that the conviction among the Allies is that the protection of childhood is essential to winning the war.

I am very glad that the same processes are being set afoot in this country and I heartily approve the plan of the Children's Bureau and the Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense for making the second year of the war one of united activity on behalf of the children and in that sense a *Children's Year*.

I trust that the year will not only see the goal reached of saving 100,000 lives of infants and young children, but that the work may so successfully develop as to set up certain irreducible minimum standards for health, education, and work for the American Child.

Cordially and sincerely yours,

WOODROW WILSON.

The general challenge of the Children's Year calls for a square deal for all children young and old. The one most definite task set down in the program for the states is the summons to save 100,000 babies. The facts at home and abroad warranted the summons even in war time, perhaps most of all in war time.

Careful investigations continuously prove at least one-third of the deaths of infants unnecessary. The first draft showed that about one-fourth of the defects which sent young men home humiliated by a discharge might have been remedied in childhood. Life-saving, always a duty, becomes imperative in war time; physical deterioration is at such a time more than ever to be avoided. To do away with preventable death and defect is the most definite business of "Children's Year."

What had happened in other warring countries proved such a step not merely advisable but imperative. Shortly after England entered into the war it was found that human life was being used up at two points. Her men were dying on the battlefields of France, but, in great part because of war conditions, her mothers and babies were dying at home faster than usual. Alarmed at the situation, the government took prompt steps to prevent such unnecessary loss of life. England's slogan, adopted to advertise the situation, was somewhat beyond the facts, but artistic exaggeration is often more effective than scientific exactness. The posters that warned England of the danger menacing the future population bore the legend, "It is safer to be a soldier in France than a baby at home."

The Children's Year program should save us in the United States the thrill of horror that ran through the English as they read this legend. England took prompt action. The results show what intelligent group action can do for social improvement. The death rate, which had risen to 110 in a thousand, was brought down to 91 in a thousand, the lowest mortality rate on record for England. France, too, in spite of the war that strains her heart and nerve, has since 1914 taken steps to see that "no woman is ignored and no child forgotten." In Belgium the corrective and preventive work being done is first of all work for children; in Italy, thorough-going precautions are under way; Germany's solicitude about the protection of her next generation has been unremitting. These precedents of foresight added to our own investigations already mentioned were warrant for the challenge to save 100,000 babies for the nation when life must be used up on the field of honor.

As first precautionary step, a stock-taking, as it were, of the children of pre-school age was suggested,—a weighing and measuring test. The height and weight of a child is a rough index of its physical development. The weighing and measuring test was therefore proposed to get this height and weight for every child of pre-school age in the country. The period from April 6—the beginning of the Children's Year—to June 6, was the time appointed for carrying on this ambitious enterprise never before undertaken in this country. All but one state have undertaken the test. In most it is still going on. The Children's Bureau has issued and the Woman's Committee has distributed over six million cards. When these are filled out and returned, the results will be tabulated and published. In the meantime, however, in each community where the work of conservation with "scales and a tape measure" has wisely begun, special notes have been taken and a stock of facts will call for special action. Malnutrition that stunts growth should have been identified: the appropriate treatment, especially sufficient milk and other food, should follow.

In general, after the weighing and measuring test, those specially interested in child hygiene will be urged to push other adequate measures that save babies for the nation. The best means for educating the individual and the community are public health nurses. More of these trained women are needed, more fully equipped and paid properly in money and repute. One hundred per cent birth registration we must have instead of our present slatternly social accounting. Better prenatal care, better obstetrical care, more infant welfare stations and health centers are also to be urged. In a word, a widespread and unremitting propaganda for the best preventive health measures is to spread all over the land, not only in the urban districts, but in the rural as well.

To plan and to urge is the part of the central government. The Children's Bureau and the Woman's Committee have done this work. Thanks to a fine display of energy and initiative on the part of forty-seven state chairmen, thanks to the hearty response from some 11,000 unit chairmen, a thing which needed to be done is being carried on in a manner that warrants high faith in the outcome.

On the whole it is possible to report progress in all but one state. The work everywhere regularly improves in quantity, intensity and quality. The social chasms are narrowing. Ingenuity

has raised money by special quest, from private benevolence, or, in a dozen states, from state funds. The press has generously given publicity, repeating facts again and again and with increasing detail; answering doubts and teaching that children, a part of the nation's defense and strength, must be protected, not used up. A dozen states have posters that blazon this forth. In several states, buttons of various devices decorate the person, or testimonial cards hang in the homes of those whose little ones have been weighed. Before the Children's Year is over, every "publicity" expedient will be tried. Each week sees a widening circle of the men of the defense organizations and the general public quickening to the call of its program.

The Children's Bureau provides the call; the Woman's Committee and the state divisions answer; the men and women of the country are rallying so that it is fairly certain that the stigma of ignorance and failure to provide for the nation's future citizens will not fall upon us. New tasks and opportunities will come as the drives for healthy play, more months of school, and assured home care are added to the present well-announced drive for health. When children bear burdens, the nation suffers; when children lack schooling that prepares them for life, the nation suffers; when they lack mothers' care and home life, they and the nation suffer most of all. The Children's Year means constructive conservation. If its program can be realized the nation's children will walk more freely to be the strength of the next generation.